

# Suicide Prevention

## for Military Families

Many people are aware that active-duty military service members are at higher risk for suicide, but they may not know that military families are too. Military families experience several unique stressors that put them at higher risk, such as frequent moves, long absences, and fears of their loved-one getting hurt or killed.

You can help prevent suicide by getting informed about the facts and learning how to offer support to someone in a crisis.

### Key Facts

- A total of 202 military family members died by suicide in 2020, including 133 spouses and 69 children.
- Male spouses accounted for about 49% of suicide deaths even though they only make up 13% of military spouses.
- The most common method of suicide death was by firearm.
- Approximately 62% of military family suicides were children under 18 years old.
- Male family members accounted for approximately 72% of suicide deaths.

For more information, refer to the Department of Defense Annual Report on Suicide in the Military Calendar Year 2021.



**TEXAS**  
Health and Human  
Services

## Unique Stressors for Military Families

All families face stressors, but military families experience several unique stressors that increase their risk of suicide, including:

- Long-term absence of a spouse or parent.
- Fear of a spouse or parent being harmed or killed.
- Increased stress due to a spouse or parent experiencing mental or physical challenges.
- Stigma for seeking mental health care.
- Frequent moves that make it difficult to establish long-term social supports, complete educational goals or secure employment (32% of spouses were unemployed in 2020 and up to 28% were underemployed).

For more information, refer to *Hiring Our Heroes, Military Spouses in the Workplace 2020*.

All these stressors can lead to higher rates of depression, substance use, and mental health issues, as well as an increased risk for divorce. The divorce rate for military families is 3% compared to 0.2% in the general population.

For more information, refer to *Divorce Rate Among Active Duty Troops Remains Stable*, Military.com.

## Warning Signs of Suicide

It's important to be alert to signs that someone may be thinking about suicide, especially during periods of transition, such as the time leading up to a deployment, when moving to a new duty station, or after a service member returns home. Here are some common warning signs to look for:

- Feelings of hopelessness, emptiness, extreme sadness, anxiety, anger or dread.
- Talking about wanting to die.
- Signs of burnout, such as neglecting one's own needs (burnout can hit caregivers of a disabled veteran especially hard).

- Changes in mood or personality, including withdrawing from others and eating or sleeping more or less.
- Taking dangerous risks, such as driving extremely fast.
- Increased substance use.

## How You Can Help

If you are concerned about a military family member, here are several ways you can help:

- Ask directly and non-judgmentally if the person is experiencing thoughts of suicide. Simply ask: "Are you thinking about suicide?"
- Offer to call the Military Crisis Line with them: **Dial 988, then press 1.**
- Offer to help them put time and distance between themselves and anything they might use to end their life, such as medications or firearms.
- Refer them to the resources below for additional support.

## Helpful Resources

- **Veterans & Military Families Crisis Line** – [veteranscrisisline.net](https://veteranscrisisline.net)
- **Vet Centers** – [vetcenter.va.gov](https://vetcenter.va.gov)
- **Cohen Military Family Clinics** – [cohenveteransnetwork.org](https://cohenveteransnetwork.org)
- **Military One Source** – [militaryonesource.mil](https://militaryonesource.mil)
- **Blue Star Families** – [bluestarfam.org](https://bluestarfam.org)
- **Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors** – [taps.org](https://taps.org) (support for anyone grieving the loss of a service member or veteran)

